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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 8, 2007

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<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae>

FEDERAL PROSECUTORS TARGET IDENTITY THEFT

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced a series of complaints, indictments, pleas and convictions in several recent cases involving identity theft. The prosecutions represent an escalation in federal efforts to combat identity theft in the Eastern District of California.

The prosecution of identity theft crimes is a high priority in the United States Department of Justice. On April 11, 2007, a federal identity theft task force made recommendations to multiple federal agencies. In response, the United States Attorney's Office has appointed an identity theft coordinator, Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal, and reached out to federal agencies, District Attorney's Offices, and state and local law enforcement agencies. The following cases have been prosecuted as part of this vigorous, coordinated effort to target identity theft crimes in the 34 counties within the Eastern District of California.

"Identity theft has become epidemic in California," said United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott. "Many identity thieves never see their victims, and may regard this felony as easy money. But identity theft can ruin a victim's credit and widespread fraud increases the fees and prices for everyone. With our state and local counterparts, we are working hard to ensure quick detection and strict punishment in these cases."

Mr. Scott added that in the federal courts, identity thieves will now face mandatory minimum sentencing. "Federal mandatory minimum sentences are no longer just for drug traffickers and violent criminals," he said, "Congress has given us a powerful new tool to drive up identity thieves' cost of doing business." The new federal statute governing aggravated identity theft, Title 18, United States Code, Section 1028A, provides that when a person commits identity theft during and in relation to any one of a host of other crimes, including mail, wire, and bank fraud, a mandatory two years be added to the sentence for the related crime.

The federal prosecutions announced today were as follows:

- On August 8, 2007, federal prosecutors announced a superseding indictment charging CLAUDIU HOTEA, 34, of Riverside, California with access device fraud, bank fraud, and aggravated identity theft. A complaint alleges that HOTEA

was arrested at the Thunder Valley Casino after he used counterfeit debit cards to withdraw funds from an ATM there. The debit card data had been skimmed from customers of Arco/AM-PM gas stations. HOTEA was convicted of a similar offense in 2003 and went to prison for that crime. HOTEA's trial on the pending charges is currently set for October 15, 2007. The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service and Placer County Sheriff's Department. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal.

- On August 8, 2007, a federal grand jury in Sacramento, California, returned a 32 count indictment charging JODI LYNN GARCIA, HEATHER MICHELLE WILSON, TANYA LESLIE WELLMAN, and TIFFANY ANN SABRAL, all of Chico, with conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, bank fraud, and possession of stolen mail. The indictment alleges that between late 2006 and June 2007, the defendants took checks from stolen mail, and used them to create forged and counterfeit checks and bogus identity documents in the names of numerous victims, which were used to defraud banks and businesses in Butte and Shasta Counties. The defendants have prior forgery convictions. The case was investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Rodriguez.
- On July 31, 2007, PARKEV KRMOIAN, 45, of Glendale, California, pleaded guilty to a single count of bank fraud. KRMOIAN was arrested while withdrawing money from a ATM using counterfeit debit cards. The debit card data had been skimmed from customers who had used their cards at Dollar Tree stores in the Eastern District of California. Approximately \$48,000 in \$20 bills was found in KRMOIAN's residence, and his counterfeit debit cards were linked to approximately \$261,000 in fraudulent withdrawals. The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service and the Glendale Police Department, and it is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal. Sentencing is set for November 13, 2007.
- A complaint issued on July 31, 2007, charging DARRON REED with four counts of making false statements in a loan application (18 USC 1014) and one count of aggravated identity theft (18 U.S.C. § 1028A(a)(1)), and DERRICK CHASE with one count of making a false statement in a loan application (18 USC 1014) and one count of aggravated identity theft (18 U.S.C. § 1028A(a)(1)). The complaint alleges that REED used the identifying information of at least three victims to secure financing to purchase two automobiles and a wave runner. CHASE used another identity to purchase a boat and an automobile. The aggregate value exceeds \$170,000. CHASE was arrested on July 27, 2007, driving one of the fraudulently purchased vehicles. He is currently detained pending trial. REED is still at large. The case was investigated by United States Postal Inspection Service and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Phillip Ferrari.

- On July 30, 2007, in United States District Court in Sacramento, DEBRA ROBERTS pleaded guilty to passing stolen forged checks in Napa, Solano, San Joaquin, and Yolo Counties between July 1, 2004 and December 6, 2006. She stipulated that the amount of forged checks for which she was responsible was between \$10,000 and \$30,000. The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal. Sentencing is set for October 15, 2007.
- On July 30, 2007, TERRY LEE PARKER, 41, and ROSEANNA MARIE GRAVEN, 34, both of Cottonwood, each pleaded guilty before United States District Court Judge Frank C. Damrell to aggravated identity theft, bank fraud, and possession of stolen mail. PARKER also pleaded guilty to being a felon in possession of a firearm. PARKER and GRAVEN admitted in their pleas that they had used stolen identity information to manufacture counterfeit checks, and created bogus driver's licenses in various victim names in order to cash the checks. PARKER, who has prior convictions for forgery, passing fictitious checks, and burglary, had more than 280 photo copies of actual, true, driver's licenses in his possession when arrested. PARKER and GRAVEN are scheduled to be sentenced on October 15, 2007. The cases were investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service and multiple law enforcement agencies in Northern California, including state and local authorities in Shasta County, Yuba County, and Sutter County, and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Rodriguez.
- On July 24, 2007 FARRELL MAHARAJ, 23, of Sacramento, was sentenced by United States District Judge Hon. Lawrence K. Karlton to 41 months imprisonment for access device fraud. On July 13, 2006, MAHARAJ was arrested by United States Secret Service agents who had gone to his gas station and made purchases using debit cards. They saw the defendant swipe their cards first through the cash register and then surreptitiously through his left hand. They also saw the defendant watch them input their card PIN numbers and then enter numbers on his cellular telephone. The defendant had in his possession a small card reader that had on it 179 debit card numbers. The defendant's card skimming was linked to \$335,788.25 in fraudulent withdrawals. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal.
- On July 30, 2007, in United States District Court in Fresno, JOSEPHINE MAGANA, 24, and DINA TIEXERA, 29, both of Modesto, pleaded guilty before United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii, to conspiracy to possess stolen mail and to possess 15 or more counterfeit or unauthorized credit cards. In their pleas, the defendants admitted that they possessed numerous stolen checks, stolen credit cards, and California drivers' licenses in other persons' names. Sentencing is scheduled for October 15, 2007. The case was investigated by United States Postal Inspection Service, and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sheila Oberto.

- On July 12, 2007, a federal grand jury in Sacramento indicted KRYSTAL LEA FREEMAN, 22, and RICHARD ELIAS ESTRADA, 40, both of Angel's Camp, on multiple charges of bank fraud, aggravated identity theft, possession of stolen U.S. identity documents, and possession of stolen mail. Both defendants are in federal custody. The defendants are alleged to have used numerous stolen drivers' licenses, social security cards, checks and credit cards to create counterfeit checks and to make purchases at stores in Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties and elsewhere. ESTRADA has prior convictions for theft, forgery and robbery, and FREEMAN has prior arrests for identity theft. The case is being investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, with the assistance of the Angel's Camp Police, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Camil A. Skipper.

- On July 11, 2007, a federal grand jury in Sacramento indicted JAMOL DEVON BARKER, 32, of Oakland; TAVAREST K. SIMPSON, 30, of Oakland; MAURICE GENE GODFREY, 42, of Oakland; and TANISHA RENEE SIMPSON, 32, of Hayward; on charges of conspiracy to use counterfeit credit cards in other persons' names. The defendants are alleged to have possessed numerous credit cards in the names Chase Bank customers, which counterfeit cards were used to purchase merchandise in the Roseville area. Defendant TANISHA SIMPSON formerly worked at Chase Home Loans. BARKER and GODFREY are in federal custody, and arrest warrants have been issued for TANISHA SIMPSON and TAVAREST SIMPSON. BARKER has prior convictions for credit card fraud, and GODFREY was previously convicted of identity theft and forgery. The case is being investigated by the United States Secret Service and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kenneth J. Melikian.

- On June 18, 2007, RADIK E. NIZAMOV, 21, of Russia, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge William B. Shubb in Sacramento to conspiracy to transport goods obtained by fraud. In his plea, NIZAMOV admitted that he participated in a conspiracy to use stolen identity and credit card information to obtain merchandise from U.S. businesses and ship the merchandise on to confederates in Russia. Charges are pending against two other defendants in the case, ROMAN KARELOV, 19, and OLEG V. UMAROV, 20, also from Russia. All three defendants are in federal custody. The case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Secret Service, and the Davis Police Department, and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner.

- On June 4, 2007, a federal grand jury in Sacramento returned a thirty-eight count indictment charging ANGELIQUE MICHELLE HALL, 30, of San Joaquin County, with bank fraud, aggravated identity theft, possessing stolen Social Security cards, and possessing stolen mail. The indictment alleges that HALL

negotiated more than two dozen counterfeit checks in Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Amador, and Calaveras Counties using stolen California driver's licenses. The indictment also alleges that she possessed stolen Social Security cards and stolen mail. The case is being investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service with the assistance of the Calaveras County Sheriff's Department, Modesto Police Department, Oakdale Police Department, and Livermore Police Department, and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Camil A. Skipper.

The United States Attorney's Office noted that the charges against defendants HOTEA; GARCIA, WILSON, WELLMAN, and SABRAL; FREEMAN and ESTRADA; BARKER, GODFREY, TANISHA and TAVAREST SIMPSON, and HALL; and REED and CHASE are only accusations, and that all defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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